

the mind's a funny fruit by joldiego

Series: [I was buried in the summer \[1\]](#)

Category: IT (Movies - Muschietti), IT - Stephen King

Genre: Amnesia, Domesticity, Eddie Kaspbrak Lives, Fix-It, Found Family, Multi, Post-Canon Fix-It, Temporary Amnesia, The Turtle (IT) CAN Help Us, farmers markets as healing, there's lesbians and they run a b&b if that's your type of thing

Language: English

Characters: Ben Hanscom, Beverly Marsh, Bill Denbrough, Eddie Kaspbrak, Mike Hanlon, Original Characters, Richie Tozier

Relationships: Eddie Kaspbrak/Richie Tozier, Minor or Background Relationship(s)

Status: In-Progress

Published: 2019-11-11

Updated: 2019-12-14

Packaged: 2019-12-16 15:01:05

Rating: Teen And Up Audiences

Warnings: No Archive Warnings Apply

Chapters: 4

Words: 20,381

Publisher: archiveofourown.org

Summary:

A man wakes up in Derry, Maine with no memory and a hole in his chest.

He names himself Richie and moves on from there.

1. Chapter 1

Author's Note:

me: has a wip that i'm lowkey struggling with but am determined to finish

me @ myself: start a new one coward

the title of this fic is from [heels by sir babygirl](#), and this chapter includes lyrics from [elise by the greeting committee](#)

i promise i'm working on you'd almost believe it, i'm just hoping that taking a break to write what's working for me at the moment will help shake some things loose in my brain to help with that fic

but in the meantime, enjoy this! i'm rather happy with it

warnings for this chapter: descriptions of injuries but nothing too graphic, homophobic language, descriptions of panic attacks

Lila Fischer is a five-year-old with an overactive imagination, and Cindy Fischer is a mother who will decidedly *not* be forgiving Lila's fifteen-year-old brother for leaving out a copy of his *Walking Dead* comic book.

Now, Lila loves to smear grey magic marker across her pudgy cheeks and stagger around their backyard, pestering the Fischers' incredibly patient labrador for *braaaaains*.

It is infinitely more tiring than Lila's mermaid phase.

It is also the reason why Cindy doesn't think much of when Lila coos, "Look, Mommy! A zombie!" from her car seat in the back as they're driving to the grocery store.

She's a good mom, she reads the blogs, she knows that it's important

to validate her children's passions. But she can't help but grimace whenever she indulges Lila's particularly gross new interest, "Oh, really? What's this one like, honeybug?"

"Mommy, just look! He's right there! He's got a hole in 'im and everything!"

Cindy sighs and glances out the passenger window. And screams. Slams on the breaks.

In the grass on the side of the road, slumped against one of the posts holding up a cheery sign that reads, "*Thank you for coming to Derry, Maine! See you again soon!*" is an ashen man with a hole in his chest.

Once an ambulance is on its way, Cindy has half a mind to be grateful that Lila thinks this is practically Christmas.

Unseen by Cindy or Lila Fischer, or the man with a hole in his chest, past the treeline, a turtle slips back into the creek.

John's a man who doesn't know a lot.

Well, he knows at least one thing. He knows that John isn't his name.

(But even that knowledge is questionable at best, because he doesn't know his name at all. So, realistically, it *could* be John, but he's fairly certain that it isn't.)

Two weeks ago, John was found unconscious on the side of the road in the outskirts of Derry. No phone, no wallet. Just his disgusting clothes, torn and bloody, the ratty bandage on his cheek, and his wedding ring.

Oh, and the gaping wound in his torso.

In some bonkers sense, he's a little thankful for the amnesia. He can't remember how the fuck he got *impaled* of all goddamn things, but something tells him he doesn't want to. Whenever he wonders, his hands go clammy and goosebumps make their way up his arms until he resolves to stop pushing at that particular subject.

(He has nightmares that he can never remember in full when he wakes. Fleeting images of eyes glowing putrid yellow, long legs scuttling around with a spider-like gait. His own limbs dangling uselessly in the air, blood spattered across someone's devastated face. The nurses have grown used to John screaming himself awake.)

He's been a resident of St. Joseph's Hospital in Bangor for about two weeks now, having slept through a solid one of them. The crater in his chest is closing up at an alarmingly unrealistic rate, but no one's really had the heart to question it.

The staff were all a bit taken with his dramatic story, and he's overheard the nurses saying that he just has *the absolute saddest brown eyes they've ever seen, huh?* He resents it a little, but they always bring him extra lime jello, and some of them come to keep him company during their breaks. It's not like he's had any other visitors, so he appreciates the attention.

No one's come looking for him. No friends, no family, no wife or husband. (He's fairly certain it's a husband that he has. He catches glimpses in his mind's eye of glasses with thick frames. Dark, thinning hair and stubbly cheeks. Obnoxious laughter.)

The ring he's found with becomes something of a double-edged sword. It's proof that there's *someone* out there who must know him, or give a shit about him in some capacity. But either they don't know where to look, or they don't care enough to find him.

Either way, this puts John in a bit of a pickle. He has no money, no identification, no place to live. He's all alone, and he has no idea where to go from here, in any sense.

He says as much to Benny, a young nurse who's become one of his favorites over the past week for reasons John can't pinpoint, as he eats lunch by his bed. (Admittedly, he says as much minus some of the melodramatics. He's a bit tired of living out the plot to a bad Lifetime movie.)

"Mm!" Benny finishes chewing his BLT, looking a bit excited, "I've been meaning to mention, my aunts, they run a bed and breakfast a few towns over, and they've been looking to hire some live-in staff.

They'd absolutely love you, and you'd have a place to stay while you're getting back on your feet! You'd just help at the front desk and with keeping the place clean, the works."

Cleaning feels like something John can do. And even if it wasn't, if he turned down an offer like that, he'd be more worried about brain damage than he already should be.

"Are you serious? That would be awesome, man, thanks so much."

"I'll make sure to tell them about you, they love taking care of people, so I'm sure they'd have you in a heartbeat."

John laughs and rolls his eyes, "Well, I'm not an invalid. I don't need a babysitter."

"No, listen, John. It doesn't matter. They will forcibly take care of you if you are living under their roof."

It's obviously a joke, but there's something about Benny's phrasing that doesn't sit right in John's stomach. He tilts his head and feels his expression do something funny. That's one thing John's quickly grown tired of. Little inane things send chills up his spine and drive him to nausea. He knows there something there in his head, something big.

There's nothing quite like suffering the after-effects of some supposed trauma that he can't even remember.

Benny must pick up on John's inexplicable discomfort, as many of the nurses often do, because he backtracks quickly. "Not like, in a weird way. Just like how grandmas just want to feed you and feed you because they always think you're too skinny? I promise, they're super rad, and they treat everyone who comes in there like family. They're also maybe the most in-love pair of people I've ever met in my whole life."

That eases a bit of the tension in John's shoulders. So, Benny gives John a card for *J&V's B&B* and promises to put in a good word for John ahead of time.

The last day before he's set to be released, an older nurse by the name of Sandra brings a wrapped gift for John.

He protests, but Sandra shuts him up quickly, saying, "For all we know it *could* be your birthday! Take the damn present, babe."

It's a book of baby names.

He spent lunch a few days ago lamenting to Sandra that it feels so weird to be called *John*. He may not know his own name, but he's pretty damn certain that John isn't it.

"Now you can flip through, see if anything rings a bell, pick out a name for yourself to put on all that paperwork for your new job. Anything'll be better than John Doe."

He gets a little misty-eyed at the gesture, which Sandra dutifully ignores as she pulls up a chair to flip through the book with him.

He gets from *Aaron* all the way to *Damien* before he gets frustrated and starts flipping to random pages, closing his eyes and pointing to a name. (Sandra snorts apple juice up her nose at the prospect of John naming himself *Vance*.)

Eventually, his finger lands on the name *Richard*.

He squints at the page, screwing up his mouth to one side. It's definitely familiar, but not quite right.

He can hear a chorus of exasperated young voices, all screeching at—

"Richard? That doing something for ya?"

"No," He says absently. He feels a little dazed. "Um, *Richie*. Richie is definitely the closest we've gotten."

"Gosh, babe, you look like someone's passed over your grave."

He's already feeling a bit shaken, but something about that strikes him in his core. The thought of his *grave*. All of the ambient hospital noise goes silent and there's— *something*. *God, there's something and it's right fucking there, it's so close, he can—*

Cold stone against his back. Blood dribbling down his chin. It's dark and getting impossibly darker. He knows he's fading fast. Somewhere to his right, people are shouting. *They're doing it. This is all worth it if they've done it. If he's safe.*

He takes a breath. All the sound comes pouring back in as quickly as it left. He turns to Sandra.

“Richie it is, then.”

After some more deliberation, he's officially dubbed Richard “Richie” Taylor.

Taylor didn't hit quite as close to home as *Richie* did, but something about *Richie Taylor* as a whole is the closest he's felt to remembering absolutely anything about himself in the past week.

He's in the bathroom changing into a set of sweats that the hospital provided him with, and he takes the opportunity to inspect his face once again.

It doesn't exactly feel unfamiliar, but it's strange. To look at a face that you know is yours and have no idea what it looked like at thirteen, or twenty, or thirty.

He has an angry pink line across his left cheek, having just got his stitches out a few days ago. A *puncture wound* was what the nurses called it. Richie's brain automatically supplied, *stab wound*. And boy, if that didn't fill him with a load of confidence. He just hopes he isn't in the mafia or something. But anyway, it's bizarre to know that the scar is brand new, but to have no idea what his face looked like without it.

They've determined that he's probably in his late thirties or early forties. Overall, he's a very average looking guy. Average height, average build, dark hair and brown eyes. (He'll acquiesce to Sandra's cooing, they are indeed very sad looking brown eyes.)

Being an incredibly average looking guy is all fine and dandy until you wake up with no memory and no one has any idea who you are. Richie would kind of kill for any extremely distinguishing

characteristic at the moment. Blue hair. A face tattoo. Anything that would make someone say, *oh? Did you say a man with six fingers on one hand? Why, that's Richie What's-His-Nuts!* at which point the whole What's-His-Nuts family would show up at the hospital and rejoice that they've found missing Richie What's-His-Nuts.

But lo and behold, Richie Taylor is painfully average. Except for both his brand new scars, which probably won't be very helpful by virtue of being brand new.

He tries smiling at himself in the mirror, with teeth and everything. It makes his scar twinge painfully and crinkle up in an odd sort of way. He wonders what he looks like when he laughs.

He realizes sinkingly that it doesn't feel like something he does a lot.

Juliet and Valeria Salvatore are truly... Something.

They insist on being called Jules and Val, and Richie loves them immediately.

Their bed and breakfast, with a wooden sign out front that reads *J&V's B&B* in a logo that matches the card in Richie's pocket, is a beautiful old farmhouse with eight rooms available for rent and one guest room available for staff. And staff is Richie now.

Benny leads him up to the porch, carrying Richie's cheap duffle of even more generic hospital clothes and toiletries, rapping on the door frame as he enters.

"Aunt Jules! Aunt Val! I've got your new boy, here!"

A delighted voice immediately crows, "NEW BOY! Val! The new boy is here!"

Richie debates interjecting that he must be at least ten years older than Benny, but that's neither here nor there.

A woman that Richie can only assume is Jules comes rushing in. The first thing he notices is that her dangly earrings are little clay eggs, sunnyside up. She takes Benny's face in both her hands, dragging the

tall man down to her height to press a messy kiss to each of his cheeks.

And then she does the same to Richie.

He winces but smiles begrudgingly, and takes the opportunity to get a good look at her.

He thinks that she's somewhere in her late fifties, her face is somewhat weathered, but every crease shouts that Jules is a woman who's done a lot of smiling in her life.

He thinks of his own face in the hospital mirror. Full of worry lines.

"I'm Juliet Salvatore, but everyone calls me Jules. And you must be our John Doe!" Richie must pull a face, because Jules looks a little sheepish and goes, "Oh, or...?"

"He's going by Richie Taylor, Jules." Benny drops Richie's duffel on top of the front desk before planting another kiss into Jules' hair and meandering off into the kitchen, likely seeking the source of the sweet scent wafting through the front room.

"Alright, Richie Taylor," She takes him by the hand and guides him over to sit on the couch before sitting herself on the coffee table so that she can sit directly in front of him, "We've already heard all about you. How're you feeling, kiddo?"

She looks so sincere that Richie thinks he might burst into tears.

"Oh, you know," he huffs a vague laugh, stalling slightly, "Just kind of frazzled, confused. Still healing up." He pats gently at his chest, fairly certain that Benny must have relayed his bizarre injury.

Jules nods and hums, squeezing his hand, "Have you learned anything useful so far? Because don't get me wrong, Val and I love to have extra hands around, and we adore the company, but I know you're probably anxious to figure out wherever it is you came from."

Some of the stress tightly coiled all the way up Richie's spine begins to release. He likes Jules a lot. She's bright and warm, and more importantly, she doesn't beat around the bush. The idea of actively

working towards finding out who he is sounds miles better than lying in a hospital bed and hoping for the best.

“I don’t know a lot at the moment. I didn’t have any ID when they found me and Richie is just a name that sounded familiar. I guess the most helpful thing is that we’re pretty sure I’m married, or have been, at least.” Jules tilts his hand in hers to get a better look at his ring. It’s plain and silver, he had checked it at one point for engravings but found nothing.

“Any inklings about this lucky person?” She wiggles her eyebrows at him as if they’re gossiping over lunch and not attempting to piece together the mystery that is Richie’s entire existence, and he loves her just a little bit more.

“I’m fairly certain that they’re a man,” Jules makes a satisfied sort of face, so Richie gives her a dry look. “What?”

“Well, kiddo, not to be rude, but I had you clocked as soon as you came in.”

“You had me *clocked*?”

“Oh, sweetpea, you’re such a twink.”

“I am not a *twink*.”

Jules simply raises an eyebrow at him.

“I am not a fucking twink! I’m not some mesh-wearing, coked-up college student, I am a grown man! I’m like forty!”

Jules gapes for a moment before bursting into bright giggles.

Richie abruptly slaps a hand over his mouth when he realizes that he just shouted *and* cursed at one of the women nice enough to give him both a job and a place to stay. *Jesus, is he really that rude?*

Jules only laughs harder at his wide-eyed expression, “Well, there’s two more things we know about you: you’re a twink *and* you’re a spitfire.”

He opens his mouth to protest, but truly can't think of any arguments in his favor, so he just kind of sputters and huffs indignantly.

"That's what I thought," Jules smirks, "Now, anything else about this mysterious husband of yours?"

Richie shrugs, "Nothing super helpful. Um, sometimes I think I remember, like, a pair of glasses? With um, thick frames, I guess. That memory feels not so far away from the inkling that I even have a husband," he sighs, feeling a bit frustrated and a bit useless. "Sorry, I know that doesn't really help."

Jules meets his eyes and gives him an encouraging smile, "Hey, Richie, baby, it's one more thing than we'd know if we knew nothing."

Richie can't help but smile back. "Yeah, I guess it is."

Richie finally gets to meet Val when she barrels into the room after spotting his pathetic, half-full duffle bag, insisting that they take a trip to Target immediately.

Or, more accurately, she grabs him by the hand and pulls him up from the couch, saying, "Jules, darling, love of my life, light of my world, quit hogging the twink. I'm gonna take him to Target."

Richie briefly wonders if Jules and Val share some sort of telepathic connection, but mostly glowers weakly over the fact that 'twink' has become one of his two defining characteristics.

On the way to Target, Val blasts the radio and screams along to ABBA, poking Richie in the side until he joins in, pleasantly surprised to learn that he remembers the lyrics to *Gimme! Gimme! Gimme!* even as he shrieks at her to keep her eyes on the road.

As the song peters out, Richie reaches to turn down the volume just a bit, to say, "I want you to know that I'm really thankful for what you and Jules are doing for me."

"Hey, my reasons are purely selfish," Val grins at him, "My back simply isn't what it used to be, we've been searching for a young

buck to whom we could relegate our chores.”

Richie huffs a laugh and Val pokes his side again.

“But in all seriousness, Rich, strangers have shown me kindness when I’ve been at my lowest. Jules was one of those strangers, once. I like to think that it’s my responsibility to do the same.”

“Still, thank you.”

She puts the truck in park and smiles softly at him, before reaching a hand out to muss up his hair. He swats at her uselessly.

“Don’t worry, we’re a lot, you’ll get tired of us real quick.”

Richie doesn’t realize until he’s faced with an extensive amount of choice for clothing, that he has no idea what he likes.

He had never seen the clothes he was found in. They were cut off of him in the hospital, likely swept away to be stored in plastic bags filed under whatever half-hearted investigation had gone into his appearance.

So he just kind of wanders around the men’s section, gathering jeans and henleys and flannels, clothes that make sense for doing housework and lawn care in. He takes care to aim for cheaper things, feeling so very aware of the fact that he has no money to pay for any of this.

Val, without a doubt, notices. She tosses in a nice fleece-lined denim jacket and a sturdy looking pair of work boots, meeting Richie’s narrowed eyes with an innocent expression.

It’s a comfortable endeavor.

At least until Richie goes vaguely catatonic at the sight of a Hawaiian shirt.

It’s obnoxiously bright, covered in a smattering of red, orange, pink and yellow. It’s some really ugly floral pattern, speckled with tropical birds, and there’s really no reason that it should make him feel as if all the air has been sucked from the room.

Maybe he was a fashion designer, and shirts this ugly drive him to physical panic. Maybe this Target actually exists on the moon, making it the world's first Moon-Target.

"Richie? You good, hon?" Val comes up to his shoulder, following his gaze.

"I think my husband wears shirts like this."

The words surprise him, he doesn't remember thinking them before speaking them aloud, but he knows without a doubt that he's right. *He sees awful patterns stretched over broad shoulders, wrinkled.*

Val picks out Richie's size and puts it in the cart. It takes him a moment to remember how to breathe well enough in order to object.

"Woah, woah, woah, that doesn't mean that *I* wear stuff like this. That shirt is still categorically one of the most vile things I've ever seen."

"Rules are rules, if it makes go all ghostly like a Victorian heroine, it's going in the cart."

"What the fuck, I'm not *ghostly*."

"I'm surprised you weren't clutching your pearls, babydoll."

"You're so mean. I'm an amnesiac, you should be nicer to me."

She just pinches his uninjured cheek.

Richie can see how she and Jules complement each other. Jules appeared to wear a lot of denim, along with bright jewel tones and different novelty pieces of jewelry, her steadily graying blonde hair swept up into a messy bun right on top of her head, cheeks perpetually rosy. Val has silky black hair in two short plaits down her back. Her posture and gait emit a sort of energy that screams *I know exactly what it is I'm doing, and I know that I know what I'm doing, so don't fuck with me*. That attitude paired with her long, flowy green dress and well-worn leather jacket just make her seem sort of ethereal and badass. The two balance each other perfectly.

The teddy-bear and the tough one, each drawing the other toward the opposite end of the spectrum. The dynamic feels familiar, but at this point, anything feels familiar if he stares at it long enough.

As they're driving back to the farmhouse, listening to Elton John this time, the light of the setting sun catches in Val's hair, lighting it up bright red.

The image hits Richie like a punch in the chest.

It turns out, there actually isn't much to do around the farmhouse at the moment.

It's about halfway through September, so all the summer traffic has dwindled, and they won't see another upswing of visitors until around Thanksgiving, so all they really have on the agenda is general upkeep, and Richie feels like a bit of a freeloader.

He dusts, he does the dishes, he rakes leaves. He cuts the grass once Jules shows him how to operate the tractor. Cleans rooms and does laundry for the odd one-off visitors they expect during this season. He fills food and water bowls for the many pets slowly coming out of the woodwork.

(A friendly golden mutt named Lorna Doone, who was undisputedly Richie's favorite, an older Bernese mountain dog called Atlas. Two calico cats named Thelma and Louise. And supposedly there's a fat orange tabby by the name of Old Man Spats who Richie has yet to lay eyes on.)

His favorite task by far is the grocery shopping.

After a particularly disastrous attempt at blueberry pancakes that neither Jules nor Val has let him live down, they discovered that it's for the best if Richie is banned from making much more than toast in the kitchen. So instead, once a week they send him out in the truck to the local farmers market.

(Once he had worked out the tractor quickly enough, they figured he must have his license. It did take him driving up and down the dirt

road in front of the house a few times to convince Jules he'd be fine making the five-minute drive. Val just made him promise he wouldn't get caught.)

But anyway, going to the farmers market does a lot for Richie in the way of making him feel like a real person. It's a relatively small town, so when he introduces himself people tend to at least know *of* his dramatic story. But by the third week, Henry the baker greets him warmly as *the Salvatore's boy*, and Anna Joe who sells fresh eggs tells him that the scar on his cheek is healing up nicely. Tish, the exuberant high school student who runs the register at the jam stand, lets him know how many shares her Facebook post has gotten so far.

The first week that Richie had shown up at the jam stand, Tish had nearly blown a gasket in excitement. As respectful as everyone had been, she really put into perspective the fact that Richie's appearance was one of the most exciting things to happen around here in a while. The other adults tended to treat him with kid-gloves, dancing around his situation carefully, but Tish had absolutely no qualms letting Richie know that he was basically *all* she and her friends were talking about at school.

"It's right out of a book!" she gushes as she gathers all the preserves on Richie's list, "Do you have, like, dreams? About your past?"

He'd be pissed if she weren't so visibly enthralled. Despite her slightly invasive questions, she seems like a sweet kid.

"I mean, yeah, I guess. I never really remember much of them when I wake up. They're kind of freaky, to be honest."

"Holy shit," Tish clearly loves this, "That's absolutely insane. Have the police been investigating where you came from? How's that going?"

"I haven't heard much since I got out of the hospital, I don't think it's really big priority for them," he forces a laugh to try and cover up the bitter undertone to his words.

"Oh my god, really? That's useless, I'm so sorry," she looks genuinely peeved for him, which makes Richie feel a little better, "Do you want

me to post to the local Facebook group for you? It's totally not the same, but people post on there all the time about lost and found pets, and it usually works out. I could get all my friends to share it, so as many people see it as possible!"

Huh. It's been two weeks since he's woken up and he never thought of that. It's genuinely the best idea anyone's had.

He gawps dumbly for a moment before saying, "Actually, that would be fantastic. That's a really good idea."

She squeals and is practically vibrating as she whips out her phone, "Awesome! Just let me take a picture!"

He gives a half-smile with his mouth closed, still a bit self-conscious of the way his scar dimples his cheek when he grins, and she snaps the photo. She spends a few minutes asking him questions as she types away before showing him the finished product.

It's a pretty good photo of him, well lit by the sunny fall day. He's been growing out his stubble to hide his scar, and paired with the flannel, he thinks he looks a little rugged.

The caption below the photo reads, *Hi everyone! Recently this man, currently going by the name of Richard "Richie" Taylor, was found on the outskirts of Derry, Maine with severe injuries to his chest and left cheek and no memory of who he is or how he came to be there. He is 5'9", of a medium build, with dark hair and brown eyes and is believed to be in his late thirties or early forties. If you know him or have any idea who he is, please do not hesitate to contact J&V's B&B at jvbb@gmail.com Please share this post so as many people see it as possible, we want to help our boy get home!*

The ending is a little much, but it's succinct enough, so he gives Tish the okay to post it.

She gives him a warm smile, looking incredibly young, "We'll find out where you're from. Don't you worry."

Richie wishes he felt that optimistic, but every morning he still wakes up sweating over a nightmare he can't remember.

The strangest things trigger Richie's memory, sometimes sending him into an outright panic.

Porky Pig stutters on the TV as he's drinking his morning coffee, and Val barely saves him from dropping the mug.

Once, when Richie was pulling up to the house in the truck after a run to the farmers market, *Bust a Move* came on the radio. He sat there in stupor until the song ended, wondering why he could feel the August sun beating down on his bare shoulders when it was nearly October and he was wearing three layers to keep out the Northeastern autumn chill.

Jules has a birdhouse set up by the kitchen window. When she points out a yellow-rumped warbler pecking at the seed, Richie's eyes fill with tears and he can barely speak. He can't even tell her what's wrong, all he can do is shrug and gape like a fish. Jules throws an arm around him and squeezes him, anyway.

He's dusting the bookshelves in the living room one day, and his eye catches on a travel guide for road-tripping around the US. Without really thinking about it, he pulls the book off the shelf and thumbs through it, only half-skimming the chapter titles and glossy pictures. At least until he stops on the Florida chapter. He doesn't know why, he doesn't even think he's ever been to Florida. Something about it just *tugs*. It *tugs* at something fucking important in his head, but he just can't seem to knock it loose.

The worst is the clown incident.

Thank god, Jules had come with him to the market that week, for the purpose of picking out some pumpkins for carving into jack-o-lanterns.

Since Halloween was fast approaching, there were a multitude of scarecrows set up along the booths, many of them dressed up in costumes. It was something of a competition between the different vendors to see who had the funniest or scariest.

Towards the end of one of the aisles, is a scarecrow done up as a clown.

It's not even meant to be scary, it's just kind of generic, but it has red and white paint across its face, scraggly red hair, poms-poms and ruffles, and Richie swears he's about to *fucking pass out*.

He just freezes, blinking dumbly at the straw man. His heart is beating so fast he feels like it's about to burst right out of his chest. His ribcage must be shrinking, that must be why he can't breathe, but mainly he just feels terror. Terror that is so new to him, but that he knows in his *fucking marrow* he's felt before. It's the kind of terror that you feel when you know you're about to die.

We all float down here. Won't you float with me, E-

Jules either noticed that he's paralyzed or hears him gasping for air, because she helps him drop all their shopping and drags him out of the busy aisles, pulling him out into a grassy clearing and sitting him down so he can brace his back against a tree.

He puts his head between his knees, puffing and panting, as Jules exaggerates her breathing and tries to get Richie to follow along.

Wheezy. Where's your little puffer, you fucking poof?

Come on, in for four, out for seven.

Gazebos. Fucking gazebos. All of it.

God, he's fucking dizzy. He's seeing little spots in his vision.

Like the turtles. You're lying on your back on the ocean floor, staring upwards towards the surface. Above you, thousands of round little shadows. Thousand and thousands of turtles. You've been here before. There was someone beside you.

He finally manages to slow his breathing. He's so fucking tired.

"Ugh, sorry," he croaks, pressing his hands over his face.

"You don't have a damn thing to be sorry for, honeybee," Jules sits on the ground in front of him, rubbing her hands up and down his shins, "We'll always be here to help you through it."

"It was th-the motherfucking clown. I don't even know why, I've never felt so f-fucking scared."

"You don't have to explain yourself to me, Richie, not unless you want to."

"Jesus, I'm fucking stuttering so much, I sound like Bill."

"Who's Bill, hon?"

Who's Bill? The question echoes in the cavern of his skull. *Who's Bill?*

"I don't know."

Richie promptly bursts into tears.

After Richie and Jules had gotten back to the farmhouse, Richie had gone to his room and napped for four hours.

He wakes up around nine and is meandering down towards the kitchen to get something to eat when he hears the music playing. Some indie singer crooning over acoustic guitar on the radio.

*I can count every freckle,
Can count every line you've rolled your eyes over at me for.
In a parking lot light, with a stripped smile,
You're making that look
Like it's funny that you're causing me trouble.*

He peeks around the doorway, and sees Jules and Val holding each other close, eyes shut, swaying around the kitchen in their pajamas.

He remembers when Benny told him that Jules and Val were the most in-love people he'd ever met. Richie had always believed him, but now he *knows* it.

He sits down on the stair with a sigh, leaning his head against the wall, listening to the soft creaks of the wooden floor in time with the delicate melody.

I'm losing my mind.

*I swore it wouldn't happen this time.
But if love makes you stupid,
You're making me the biggest fool
You'll ever find.
So make me yours from this day forward.
And I'll grow to be somebody you deserve
With promises for all that we're worth.*

He realizes belatedly that he's crying, but it's different from earlier.

He had been sobbing, filled so much *fear* that he just didn't know what to do with it. That he was bursting with it.

This is like spilling over. A cup of hot tea filled with too much water, overflowing. Tears tracing their way silently down his cheeks. His heart feels like a gooey wad in the back of his throat that he's just about ready to cough up. A gross analogy, but not too far off.

*And all of it's been in the sheets
you kick to the end of the bed.
I'll make every morning with your side
A bit of a mess.
Cause that's how you like it.
And I really like you.
Oh, I love you to death.*

God. He doesn't know who it is, but he knows he fucking misses him.

Across the country, Mike Hanlon sees a Facebook post made by Tish Weaver.

Across the country, Mike Hanlon gets in his car and starts to drive.

2. Chapter 2

Summary for the Chapter:

lol jk this isn't gonna be two chapters (it might end up being four)

thank you guys for your sweet comments!!

warnings for this chapter: descriptions of horror elements from the movies, so mild gore ig, discussions of injuries, discussions of death

Some of the things that trigger Richie's memory are straight-up bizarre.

Once, he's ducked into the bathroom to wash his hands after a broken pen covered them with black ink, leaving the door open behind him. Val doesn't mean to startle him, just to pop in and ask if there's any gas left in the truck's tank.

But the sight of her over Richie's shoulder in the mirror sends him into fight or flight mode, dropping to the floor as if he's expecting to get decked.

For a moment, Val is a large man with a smile like a gash through the center of his face, toothy and awful, wielding a knife that glints silver. The ink staining his palms and fingers becomes a greenish-gray sludge. The image disappears as quickly as it invaded, leaving behind a stunned looking Val in the doorway.

But the scar on Richie's cheek aches dully along with his backside where it hit the tile floor.

So, bizarre.

(Sometimes he wonders if he's a spy.)

He kind of caught onto these peculiarities from the start, given his extraordinary injuries, but his episode with the clown really gets him thinking.

He's been able to recall more and more of his nightmares when he wakes. And he starts to look at them in a new light.

At first, he considered them an abstract representation of whatever trauma was buried so deep in his psyche; fantastical images that his brain cooked up when he couldn't remember the specifics, just the fear.

But sometimes he can't help but wonder if that's not the case.

He never says so, never even tells Val or Jules about his whacked-out nightmares for fear that they'll look at him differently, but some of the things he dreams up appear just a little bit *too* vivid in his mind's eye.

A woman, eyes blank and white, teeth like needles. Her face stretched and contorted, like a melted clock in one of those paintings. He sees flashes of her latched onto someone's face, only visible by a head of curly hair as his hands scrabble against the beast.

A man. A man who's so very, very sick. Face sallow and inflamed, all swollen and wrong looking. Covered in boils, leaking pus. His graying fingers wrapped in tattered bandages offer a little red pill. His voice is like a death rattle, *How about a blowjob?*

A little boy in a little yellow raincoat. A bloody stump where his right arm should be. His wide eyes and innocent face distort, twisted out of shape into something so incredibly angry.

YOU'LL FLOAT, TOO!

If Richie isn't certifiably insane, he should consider taking up writing.

But that's the thing, Richie doesn't *feel* as if he's losing his mind. (And yes, that must be what all people who are losing their minds say, but he means it. Feels its truth from the depths of his belly.)

He knows he's met the devil.

He sees these monsters in his head and he knows that he's met them. Seen them with his own two eyes. Fought them. Hell if Richie understands why, or where the fuck they came from.

And then there's the turtles.

The nightmares shift and evolve, changing as Richie remembers each new creature more horrifying than the last. But every few nights he returns to the ocean floor.

He's fully submerged, but he's not wet. He's not drowning, but he's not breathing either. All in his ears is that loud sort of silence that comes with having your head underwater, echoing and expansive. The sense of calm that comes with jumping into the deep end of the pool and just letting yourself drift for a moment, as far below the surface as you can stand. Floating, feeling all at once as if you exist separately from your body and that your body is the only thing to exist. Until your lungs begin to burn and you have to kick your legs and flail back up to tread water.

This is like that, only Richie's lungs never burn. He just watches the countless sea turtles pass by above his head, letting the peace wash over him.

He's not alone. There's someone directly to his left, but he can never seem to turn his head to look at them. He doesn't feel as if he needs to, though. Just knowing that they're there is enough.

Every once and a while, in these dreams, an odd emotion pools in his stomach. It's not his own. It's something like regret. Guilt. A promise of something *more*. To fix what's been broken.

But Richie doesn't even know what's been broken.

He always feels slightly unsettled when he wakes up from those dreams, however pleasant they are. He knows deep down that it's simply not somewhere he's meant to be.

At least not yet, whispers a voice in the back of his head, so quiet it doesn't even register as a proper thought. Just a wisp of a notion of an intimation.

Just once, he has a dream that he's a kid. Maybe twelve, thirteen. Tucked into a hammock beside another boy, taller and lankier than him. He can't see his face, can't tilt his chin up to look but doesn't

think he could picture it anyway. They're both all sharp elbows and knobby knees, but Richie's never been so comfortable. The summer heat lies over them like a blanket while they nap. As he drifts in and out of consciousness, he swears the other boy presses a kiss into his hair.

He wakes up feeling warm, even as the November chill seeps in through the windows.

Childhood sweethearts, he surmises, feeling lighter than ever.

For all that Richie wants to know *who on earth he is*, he truly has it pretty sweet right now.

He's been living with Jules and Val for a little over a month and a half, and despite the puzzling dreams, grotesque nightmares, and his memory (or lack thereof) induced episodes, he's pleasantly surprised to realize that he feels kind of *settled*.

On Val's birthday, they all get drunk on an obscene amount of hard cider and hold an impromptu dance party in the living room. It evolves into something of a pseudo-prom when Jules emerges with an armful of clothes ranging from black tie to Party City, proclaiming through hiccups that they 'feel bad' because they aren't worn enough.

Val ends up in a slinky blue dress with a threadbare flannel tossed over it, topped off with a bejeweled plastic tiara that declares, *Happy 2011!* Jules parades around in a purple tulle skirt along with a leather jacket that Richie strongly suspects was swiped from Val's closet.

And Richie.

Richie is finagled into a suede fringe vest over a horrifyingly neon green and black striped shirt. And a headband with a fluffy angel's halo.

"*Perfect!*" Jules announces, cupping his face in her hands and jostling him around. He just grins back, feeling loose-limbed and pink.

"He sure is, baby," Val loops an arm around her waist, pressing a kiss

to her cheek, “The halo was a nice touch.”

He hijacks Val’s phone to fuck with the Spotify and selects an eighties nostalgia playlist on a whim. *Time after Time* pours through the speakers, and Val and Jules fall into the same practiced sway Richie stumbled upon in the kitchen that one night, if the romance is slightly squandered by the way they drunkenly squawk the lyrics to each other, giggling and stumbling.

Richie watches on, smiling. Eyes suddenly wet as he rocks back and forth on his own, *well* inebriated past the point of being self-conscious of his lame dance moves or hairpin emotional triggers.

By the second verse, Jules gasps as if remembering something important, and then tugs Richie in to join them. He laughs wetly and buries his face in her shoulder, holding them both close.

Later, they’re slumped on the couch, Val carding her fingers through Jules’ hair while Jules drools against her side. The smile on Val’s face is so tender and loving, it fills Richie’s chest with a desire so strong, it *aches*.

He thinks about saying so. About crumpling into Val’s other side and weeping, *I know they’re out there somewhere, Val. I know that I have people, I can feel it singing in my blood. I can feel him, like every single cell calling out for its magnetic pole.*

He doesn’t say that.

Instead, he reaches out, takes her hand. Squeezes it. Quietly goes, “I love you guys so much. Even when you dress me up in stupid shit,” He tugs at a piece of fringe, as a visual aid.

Val smiles back dopily, “That’s what to do to family, kid. You know we love you, too, Rich.”

At that point, Jules snuffles sleepily and throws an arm around Val’s waist, nuzzling closer against her. Val must see the longing plain on Richie’s face, because she pinches his palm lightly to get his attention, “Hey. Don’t you worry, okay? Your people are out there waiting for you, and we’re gonna find ‘em.”

Richie sighs, too drunkenly warm and drowsy to argue, “Yeah. But even if it takes years, even if I never do, I know I have you guys. You’re my family, too.”

“You’re damn right, babydoll.”

Richie *likes* his life. The little space in the world he’s carved out for himself worn smoother and smoother every day, like a worry stone polished by anxious fingers.

He likes that on Sunday mornings, the three of them pass around the newspaper. Jules does the crossword, Val reads the comics, and Richie does the sudoku.

He likes going for walks around the property with Lorna Doone and Atlas, the brisk air helping to loosen up his chest when the dull ache of his scar makes his ribs feel a bit too tight.

(Once, on a longer hike nearby, just with Lorna since Atlas couldn’t make the longer treks, Richie is walking down an open grassy hill. The sun is bright, and there’s a light breeze. *He’s walking single file, people in front of him, people behind him. Important people. Six of them.* But Richie’s alone. Just Lorna Doone, zooming around and barking at his heels.)

He likes the groove he’s gotten into, the consistency of his schedule. He likes the community that’s welcomed him with open arms. He likes when Tish chirps, “Seven thousand shares, Richie!” as she rings him up for jam.

Upon this realization, he’s feeling kind of cheery and wrapped up in himself, so he doesn’t really register when an unfamiliar truck pulls up in front of the house as he’s raking leaves in the yard until the driver gets out and approaches him.

Richie finishes up with the pile he’s on, not really looking up, “Hey, man, you looking to rent a room? If you give me a second, I can get you checked in.”

“It’s really you,” a broken voice says.

Richie looks up and the world falls out from under him.

He's a tall black man with the kindest face Richie's ever seen.

This is a face he knows.

He blinks, the familiar tugging feeling fills his head, stronger than it's ever felt.

"I know you, don't I?"

The man nods shakily, opening his mouth but apparently unable to speak.

Richie knows the feeling.

He raises one trembling hand towards Richie's chest, looking terrified, and Richie realizes that he must know what happened, how he got hurt.

"Rich, you good out here?"

They freeze when Val calls out from the porch, likely a bit concerned by whatever odd display is going on in their front yard.

The man looks up at Val, eyes wide and frightened, "You know him? He's real? He's been here this whole time?"

Val furrows her brow, looking incredibly suspicious, but nods all the same.

He looks to Richie again and steps forward to throw his arms around him, starting to weep into his shoulder.

Richie can't help but hug him back. It's the basest instinct he's ever felt, the need to hug this man right here, this man who's name he can't even remember.

He doesn't realize that his ears are ringing until the noise clears, and he can hear the man saying, "I'm so sorry. I'm so sorry. Oh my god, we all thought you were dead. Eddie, I'm so sorry, I missed you so much, we all did. Jesus."

Eddie.

Eddie Kaspbrak. Eddie Spaghetti. Eddie-Bear. Eduardo. Eds. Edward Fucking Kaspbrak.

That's his fucking name.

He laughs hysterically into the man's shoulder and starts crying right along with him.

He might not be able to remember this man's name, but he knows now. He's been *found*. He's gonna get everything back, every damn thing. Fill every fucking hole in his head.

The man finally pulls back, smiling, holding Eddie by the shoulders, "I still have to call everyone, holy shit, I was so afraid that it was some sort of trick, I had to come and see for myself before I told anyone."

Eddie is still grinning, "What do you mean a trick?"

The man's face falls a little bit, "Wait, yeah. The post, it said– What do you remember?"

"Well, as of two seconds ago just my fucking name. Eddie Kaspbrak. It just came back to me when you said it. There's been, like, little things. Small triggers. But nothing super substantial."

The man nods, looking dazed, and Eddie kind of raises his eyebrows at him. He catches on, going, "Oh! Oh, um. Mike. I'm Mike Hanlon."

"Mike Hanlon! Okay, Mike."

"Richie, what's going on?" Val's come down to the yard in all the commotion, Jules watching on from the porch.

He smiles widely at her, his chest filled with so much *happy* he doesn't know what to do with it all.

"Val, it's Eddie! That's my name! Eddie Kaspbrak! And this is Mike Hanlon, and he knows me!"

Her mouth forms a perfect "O," eyes going wide before she starts cheering gleefully, sweeping him up in a hug, not hesitating the pull

Mike in, too. Jules appears a moment later, piling in and ruffling up Eddie's hair.

Mike has a funny look on his face when they finally untangle. "Wait, so you've actually been going by Richie? Richie Taylor?"

He nods, feeling a little wary of whatever makes that so amusing. "Yeah, it was the first name I found that felt significant, I guess. Familiar."

"God, we have friends that are never gonna let you live that down."

Eddie can overlook the vague promise of imminent teasing for the notion that he has *friends*. People who are missing him. People who are going to hug him, and cry, and feel *just right* like Mike does. Like coming home.

"How did you find me, anyway?"

"A friend of mine, back in Derry shared a Facebook post. I just about had a heart attack when I saw your picture, and I started the drive out here about an hour later, I was in Arizona."

Eddie has the wherewithal to think, *Tish is gonna freak the fuck out*, before he realizes, "Jesus Christ, Mike, you *drove* here from fucking Arizona?"

"Well, yeah," Mike says it as if it should be obvious, "Of course, Eddie, *you* were here."

Fuck, Eddie thinks he might just burst. He gets too choked up to say anything, so he just pulls Mike in for another hug.

Finally, Jules starts herding them inside, scolding them for doing all this out where they'll *catch their death in the cold*. Mike kind of coughs uncomfortably at that before going to grab his bag from the car.

Once they're settled in the living room, Jules bringing in mugs of tea to help calm everyone's manic energy, Mike finally starts to fill them in.

"You, um. A house fell on you."

“A house fell on me?”

Mike glances at Jules and Val, looking uneasy.

“Basically. Sort of. That’s the simplified version.”

“Babe, I think we deserve the extended-cut,” Val quips, taking a sip from her mug.

“Right.”

Mike is sweating. And a few things start to slide into place for Eddie.

“I have dreams sometimes. Nightmares, really. About something awful. And a cave.”

Mike looks relieved and terror-struck all at once, “Yeah. Pennywise. It.”

Eddie blinks and he can see It, behind his eyelids. *The clown.* Grinning at him with too sharp teeth. Bloody teeth. Eyes like grimy light bulbs.

“Pennywise,” he can’t help but repeat. His voice like a whisper.

“Are you two from Derry?” Val’s question startles them out of their stupor, her voice more subdued than Eddie’s ever heard. Jules turns to her wife with a crease between her brows, and Eddie notes that it seems to be in concern rather than confusion.

He doesn’t know the answer, but Mike gravely responds, “Yeah, we grew up there.”

Val swallows. “I did too. My big sister went missing when I was three, she was eleven. I was too young to really know what was going on, but my brother was eight. He always told me stories, when we were growing up. About the thing that took her.”

Mike nods, “And you believed them. Believed in It?”

Jules takes Val’s hand, and Val nods.

Mike is speaking to all of them now, “When we were kids, in the summer of ‘89, we fought It for the first time. The seven of us.”

“The Losers Club,” the words pry their way, unbidden, from Eddie’s throat.

“Yeah,” Mike smiles softly before his expression drops into something more somber, “And we promised the first time, that if It ever came back, we would, too. And we’d kill It. So, twenty-seven years later, we did. Um, well. All but one of us.”

Eddie feels like he has ice chips in his lungs. *All but one of us.*

Guess Stanley Could Not Cut It.

“Oh god,” Eddie claps a hand over his mouth, “He’s dead, Mike.”

Mike squeezes Eddie’s arm, “Stanley, yeah,” his voice is choked with emotion.

Stan. With his birds and his yarmulke. His observant eye and steady hand. The best.

They have to take a minute to breathe together before Mike can continue.

“We fought It under the Neibolt House, and we killed It, we won, but before we could, It got you. With one of Its claws. But you were the one who figured out how to kill It.”

Eddie’s hand drifts up to his chest. He thinks of one of the first memories that came back to him, dangling in the air, blood spattered across someone’s devastated expression. He takes a deep breath and nods shakily at Mike. He doesn’t know why he does that.

“You died, Eddie. You were dead, there was no way you could have survived that. And the house was coming down on top of us, so—” Mike’s voice breaks, “So, we had to leave you down there. I never forgave myself for that. That we couldn’t get you out. But now you’re fucking here!” He squeezes Eddie’s shoulders.

“Like an act of god,” Jules says softly.

Mike's gaze goes kind of spacey, an odd expression on his face, "Yeah. Something like that."

Eddie sits there, feeling like he's been turned inside out. *You died, Eddie. You were dead. Dead, dead, dead.* How the fuck could he have died? When people die, they're dead. And they stay that way. That's how the world keeps spinning on its axis, people fucking die and they make room for new people. The holes in their chests don't heal over, leaving behind mottled scars, puckered and pink. Closing up to hold lungs that are still breathing, a heart that pumps blood.

Fucking Derry, he supposes. Like an instinct. The part of him that always knew, *Nothing in Derry ever happens like it's supposed to.*

They all sit in the living room, sipping their tea, processing. Eddie's grateful that no one feels the need to fill the silence.

Inexplicably, he thinks of the turtles.

Eventually, Jules and Val insist on comfort food for dinner, and disappear with the promise of whipping up grilled cheese and tomato soup, but Eddie has a feeling that they just wanted to give him and Mike some privacy to finish catching up on, well, Eddie's entire life.

Eddie fiddles with his ring and finally musters up the courage to ask, "I have a husband, right?"

Mike turns sort of dumbstruck and very intelligently says, "Um."

Eddie soldiers on, "Because they found me with this wedding ring, and I can sort of remember, like, ugly patterned button-downs? And glasses. Glasses with thick frames. All those memories seemed kind of... connected, I guess."

"Oh! Wow, um," Mike presses his lips together, furrowing his brow and considering his words, "That was actually something I wanted to talk to you about. One of our best friends is named Richie. Richie Tozier."

"Oh, shit! Richie Tozier, Richie Taylor. I get why that's funny now," the name lingers for another second, "That's him, isn't it?"

Starting to remember Richie isn't something concrete, it's more like a feeling. A release of dopamine in his brain, the sense memory of tucking into the side of someone much taller than him. Limbs tangled, fighting to dunk each other underwater, pushing and shoving but never letting go. Sometimes Eddie lets him win. Because in the times in between, when he's gracious enough to let Eddie catch his breath, their foreheads bump and they just sit in the water, holding on tight until someone splashes the other in order to hide the fact that they're blushing. He climbs in through Eddie's bedroom window, huddling close on his twin bed, and—

Mike takes a deep breath, but his face looks sad. Eddie's hands feel clammy.

“See, Eddie, Richie sounds like the person you're describing, but you two aren't married, and as far as I know, you weren't together. You, um, you have a wife named Myra, back in New York.”

You're married? What, like, to a woman?

Oh. Alright.

Something occurs to him. Thinking back to the wide-eyed shock on Mike's face.

Oh. Alright.

“Mike, was I out? Before all this?”

Mike sighs, looking sheepish, “At least not to me. But it didn't really seem like it on the whole, either.”

“Huh.”

The thought hadn't even occurred to Eddie. Ever since he had woken up, he had a vague notion of *Oh, yeah. Him. Whoever he is, that's my person.* It never even crossed his mind that this might not be something people *knew* about him.

For Mike's benefit, he goes, “Well, I'm gay. I figure whatever life I was living in before all this made that difficult to say, so I might as well do it now while it's easy.”

Mike smiles, huffing a laugh, “Look, Eds. I want you to know, even though you weren’t out, and you and Richie weren’t together, I think we all kind of picked up on *something* going on between the two of you. It’s not like this is all out of left field. Especially since– Well, I mean–”

“Especially since...?”

“Richie hasn’t been okay. Since you died. Don’t get me wrong, we’ve all been grieving, but Richie has really been... Spiraling. Bev and Bill probably know better about how he’s doing than I do. We all keep up with each other, but Bill is out in LA with him, and I know that Bev is the one he talks to the most.”

Eddie sits there for a moment. It’s a lot of information at once.

Part of him wants to press, *spiraling, how? Is Richie okay?* but the rest of his brain is occupied by little blinking lightbulbs, going *Bill! The strongest of us, the one we all turned to. He always seemed to be the tallest of us even when Richie rocketed above him. Beverly. Bev. Full of fire. The bravest. Who always made you feel seen. Bev who fits perfectly with Ben. Ben! Soft-spoken. So determined to build us all a home.*

God, it all just about barrels him over. His eyes are prickling dangerously.

He can’t remember it all, but it’s a start. Like an exoskeleton of everything he knows and loves.

(The more pessimistic side of him argues that, sure, he’s Eddie Kaspbrak, but with all the important bits scooped out, left hollow like Jules’ prize jack-o-lanterns. Or maybe refilled, but with fluff instead of substance. Confetti.)

“Mike, can we get them all here?”

“I’ll start making some phone calls.”

3. Chapter 3

Notes for the Chapter:

lmao this just keeps getting longer and longer, but i'm pretty that 5 is going to be the *actual* chapter count haha (and then •• a sequel mayhaps ••)
thank you all for your sweet sweet comments! i read every single one and they all mean so much to me, i'm gonna try and go through tomorrow to send replies

warnings for this chapter: minor panic attacks, minor discussions of injuries, some discussion of the after-effects of abuse

"Mikey! What's up? How's Arizona?"

"Oh, it was spectacular. I've never seen so few trees, that was crazy. I still have a bunch of pictures to send you all."

"Oh, was? Moved on already?"

"Yeah, um, that's what I'm calling about. Please, don't freak out, but I'm back in Maine. At the moment."

A sharp inhale. *"Oh. Any s-specific reason?"*

"Yeah, actually, there is. And, Bill, I need you to breathe and not panic, because it's nothing bad, but I need all of you to come back, too."

"It's nothing bad, but you can't tell us what it is?"

"Not over the phone, no. It's really important that this is in person."

A sigh. *"Ben and I will look at flights out for tomorrow. We'll always come when you need us, Mike, but you know how this sounds, right?"*

"If it helps, we probably won't even have to step foot in Derry."

"You still there, man?"

...

"Richie?"

"I can't do that, Mike, you know I can't."

"I wouldn't ask you if we didn't *really* need you here. And this is a good thing, I swear to god." A heavy silence, carefully considered words, "This could change things for us, Rich."

More silence. Just as heavy.

"Change things, how?"

"Just come, okay? Bill said he'd call so you guys could plan to take the same flight."

"Okay, Mike. See you soon, I guess."

"Do you want me to find Myra's number for you? We could get her here, too. If you wanted."

Eddie is startled out of his stupor, listening to these new but familiar voices crackle through the phone, each word stirring up a new memory.

He's embarrassed to say that it takes him a few seconds to remember who Mike said Myra even *is*.

His wife. *Jesus*.

"Oh! Um," he tries to picture this woman who he supposedly promised to spend the rest of his life with, realizing with no small amount of guilt that he just *can't*. He wonders if she *Knows* about him, *Knows* with a capital K. If their whole marriage is a sham that they've agreed upon out of convenience, or if he's really just selfish enough to do that to someone. Or if he was really so fucking repressed that he had fooled himself just as soundly as everyone

around him.

God, does he always sweat this much?

“I think I want to get everything sorted out with you guys, first,” he decides, “Especially since I’m— I mean, you know. That, um, I probably won’t stay with her.”

Mike squeezes his shoulder, a sympathetic look on his face. “Hey, you’ve got a lot to figure out right now. I think you’re entitled to take as long as you need.”

Eddie smiles back at him, but it feels strained. “Does it make me a bad person? That even though I can’t remember her, I really just don’t want to see her right now?”

“I think if there’s any time to follow your gut instinct, it’s now. And if you don’t want to see her, I don’t think there’s anything wrong with trusting that feeling.”

He thinks about Richie.

Trust your gut instinct.

“Hm. Thanks, Mike, that actually really helped.”

He throws an arm around Eddie’s shoulders, tugging him in and ruffling his hair.

“It’s what I’m here for, man.”

They eat dinner with Val and Jules, scarfing down grilled cheese while they all swap stories; about growing up in Maine, about Eddie.

Eddie mainly just sits. Listens. Politely ignores the unsubtle looks of concern being shot his way.

What the fuck can he say? He’s exhausted. All of this *remembering* has him feeling dead on his feet.

Well, *not* dead. Apparently.

Mike barks a laugh when he spots a framed photo from Jules' birthday, a blurry timer-cam shot of the three of them in their ridiculous garb. Eddie's face is flushed with drink and he's smiling wide, crinkled scar on full display despite the beard he has growing in.

Mike picks it up with careful hands, turning to Jules and Val with a soft smile on his face, "I'm really glad that Eddie found you guys."

"We're glad Eddie found us, we've been wanting to outsource our chores for years," Val takes Jules' hand, "And you know, we love him to pieces and stuff."

"And," Jules takes care to meet Mike's eyes, "We're glad that *you* found him. He may not have known precisely who you all were, but he was missing you something awful."

And *god*, Eddie has a fucking golf-ball stuck in his throat, and his vision is going slightly blurry, so all he can do is sniffle pathetically and give a wobbly smile.

But when he turns to Mike, his eyes are equally glassy, so he doesn't feel quite so pitiful.

By 8:30, he's just about nodding off into his soup, so Val sends him to bed. He tries to help with some dishes, but Mike quickly insists on doing Eddie's share, gently nudging him out of the kitchen.

He's just too drained to argue.

He's out the second his head hits the pillow, and then there are *turtles*.

Turtles above his head.

Water all around him.

Someone to his left.

Someone. Right fucking there. To his left.

He's never felt the need to look before, but now the urge courses through

his veins like a drug.

It feels like moving through molasses. Like pushing together two magnets that are meant to repel.

It takes an eternity, but Eddie looks to his left.

There's another man lying on the ocean's sandy floor, his hair creating a curly halo where it floats around his head. A pattern of thin scars create a border around his face. They're incredibly faint, so Eddie doesn't really know how he noticed them in the first place.

The man is looking right back at Eddie, his brow furrowed in concentration. Confusion.

He's so familiar.

A wave passes over them both, and suddenly, it's right there.

Stanley. That's Stanley fucking Uris.

A look of recognition appears on Stan's face at the same time.

They can't speak, but they give each other disbelieving grins. At least until Stan's expression transforms into one of confusion, then grim understanding. Almost approaching anger.

Eddie wishes he could tell him. That everything's fine, except that it's really not because he's gone. That they all miss him and love him so fucking much.

But he can't. He just tries to send a consoling expression his way. Tries to think so hard that his love and reassurance will penetrate Stan's skull.

Then, a round shadow descends from the surface, growing larger and larger as it approaches. A sea turtle. An impossibly large one.

It floats just above them, watching Eddie and Stan, leveling them each with one of its big round eyes. Starry and deep and infinite.

In a split second, with a deafening roar, the ocean drains.

Eddie doesn't jolt awake, so much as he just suddenly *is* awake.

Lying in bed with his eyes wide, gazing up at the popcorn ceiling of his room.

He feels reassured, he feels like he just learned something important.

But it's gone, the thought dissipating like morning fog out in the orchard as the sun rises.

He should be unsettled by this feeling, but for some reason, he's certain that everything is fine.

"Bev and Ben are getting in a little after one, and Bill says that he and Richie get in at three, so we have a little bit of time to kill," Mike fills them all in over breakfast.

(Eddie's graduated from normal toast to french toast, under Val's careful supervision. He wants to do something nice for his friends, both old and new. It's a little burnt, but they thank him profusely anyway, and he blushes under the attention.)

"It's a Saturday, so we can head over to the farmers market, I haven't done the shopping yet this week. And Tish, the girl who made the Facebook post, I really want to go thank her," he inexplicably begins to worry that he's being pushy and backtracks a little, "I mean, if you want to come. You can always stick around here, I don't know if—"

"Eddie," Mike cuts him off with a hand on his shoulder and a warm look, "Of course I want to come."

He seems perfectly content with the idea, so Eddie quirks up one side of his mouth in return, feeling reassured. For the moment, at least.

For all of the anticipation coursing through his veins, Eddie's surprised to discover just how nervous he is about reconnecting with everybody. It's a feeling like stumbling on the stairs, expecting a step to be an inch or so higher than it actually is. You land on your feet, but your stomach still swoops dangerously. Your pulse still races in surprise.

He hates how familiar the sudden wave of anxiety feels. Like pressing an old bruise.

Jules pokes his shin with her toe, shooting him a questioning glance. He just shrugs and gives her pinched smile, shaking his head minutely to say, *don't worry*.

Apparently, Eddie does enough worrying already.

“Richie! Seventy-five hundred shares, now! And the apple butter’s back in stock, I know it’s your favorite.”

Eddie smiles wide, feeling just a little giddy because Tish’s excitement is often contagious, and he knows they can only go up from here.

“Hey, kiddo! It’s Eddie, actually. Eddie Kaspbrak is my name,” he kind of smothers his grin, jokingly downplaying his own elation.

(Introducing himself confidently is still something of a novelty.)

He doesn’t last very long, because he can’t help laughing gleefully when Tish gasps dramatically and her eyes turn to saucers. She launches herself out from behind the booth and pulls him into a bear hug, shouting in his ear at a mile a minute all the while.

“*Oh my god*, that’s amazing! You look like an Eddie, that suits you! Holy shit, this is so crazy! Did you remember? What happened?”

He squeezes her in return and makes amused eye contact with Mike over the top of her head.

“See, Tish, this is one of my best friends, Mike Hanlon,” she steps back, bouncing on her toes, looking to Mike and noticing him for the first time, “He saw a certain Facebook post and recognized me.”

Tish’s jaw drops and she squeals so loudly that several heads turn in their direction.

And then she practically barrels Mike over in a hug.

Watching her (barely) five-foot frame nearly knock over Mike's at a broad 6'4" makes Eddie laugh so hard that his stomach hurts.

After the requisite gushing on Tish's part, Mike meets her eyes meaningfully and tearfully.

"Seriously, thank you so much. We thought Eddie was— We never thought we'd see him again, and we might not have without your help."

"It was nothing," she says, uncharacteristically quiet as she swipes at her cheeks, shy smile firmly in place.

Mike's whole-hearted sincerity tends to have that effect on people.

They invite her over for a celebratory dinner once the rest of the losers arrive, gather their jam and continue their way around the booths, Eddie making introductions and accepting congratulations all the way around.

While they're loading up the truck, Mike hauling baskets and crates with practiced ease, Eddie is suddenly struck with an image of a much younger Mike, fifteen or sixteen. The rest of the losers lazing in the grass as he finishes up with the last of his chores.

They're arguing about this or that, some comic or movie, when Mike passes by with a bale of hay on one shoulder. It looks heavy, but he doesn't struggle under the weight, shooting a smile in their direction as he passes by on the way to the barn.

The conversation quickly peters out as they're all captivated by their sweet and handsome friend.

Eddie remembers glancing at Richie only to find him glancing back at the exact same time.

Mike notices Eddie staring and quirks an eyebrow at him.

"Nothing," Eddie smirks, "Just remembering."

It's approaching one o'clock, and Eddie's feeling a little short of

breath.

“Okay, their flight landed and Bev says they’re about a half-hour out. And no offense, Eddie, but I should probably talk to them alone first, just to ease them into... the whole thing,” Mike explains as they sit on the floor in the living room, Atlas’ big head resting in Mike’s lap.

“No, yeah, that’s– Yeah.”

Mike must see the panic in Eddie’s eyes, because he grabs his hand and says, “Hey, man, just breathe, okay? They’re gonna be shocked at first, and they might be a little scared, but in the end, they’re gonna be ecstatic. We all missed you so much.”

Eddie closes his eyes for a moment. He focuses on the give of the carpet beneath him, the couch at his back. Mike’s warm palm against his. One of the cats headbutts his arm, Thelma probably, always the most affectionate. He takes a deep breath, and tries to get the tightness in his chest to loosen.

“Thanks, Mike.”

And so this is how Eddie finds himself sequestered away in his room, feeling oddly like a child who’s been sent to time-out.

A voice in his head coos, *Eddie-bear*, sending chills down his spine. He abruptly decides to shove whatever *that* is into a lock-box in the darkest fucking corner of his mind.

It obviously needs to be unpacked, but not when he’s about to resurrect himself in the eyes of his best friends. He’s got bigger fish to fry right now.

He just hates the waiting.

Just be patient, Mike had said, *I’ll come get you when they’re ready*.

Being patient sucks. Eddie doesn’t think it’s something he’s good at.

Feeling embarrassed, he pulls the ugly red Hawaiian shirt out from under his pillow. From the first outing he had with Val.

He understands the significance of it now.

The shirt's been folded half-heartedly, but it's wrinkled and crumpled from the many times Eddie's woken up from a nightmare and latched onto the damn thing like a security blanket.

He tells himself he keeps it here in his room because it isn't fit to be seen in the light of day. The print is so repulsive that it can only be looked at directly at night, so keeping it under his pillow only makes sense.

He doesn't put it on, but he sort of balls it up in his fists, flopping back onto the bed.

A car pulls up outside.

Eddie hates the waiting.

Bev is worried about Mike.

She's worried about Richie, too, but that's become so constant that it's more like background radiation.

Not to say that she's *ignoring* her worry for Richie, he's one of her best friends and deserves all the worry in the world when he's doing poorly, but at the moment she's experiencing *acute* worry for Mike, so she allows herself to focus on that.

She doesn't like worrying, but she likes focusing on something that isn't her divorce, the grueling endeavor of taking back her company or the ever-increasing possibility that It isn't dead.

Because why else would Mike willingly return to Maine after finally making his escape.

She doesn't say as much to Ben. She knows that he's anxious as well, but he's also much quicker to trust and take Mike at his word.

Nothing bad, I promise. But it needs to be in person.

I've got a place we can stay and everything, it isn't even in Derry.

It's a few towns *over* from Derry, actually. Which is like, fine, she supposes.

When they pull up to the bed and breakfast, Bev is pleasantly surprised that it doesn't look fucking haunted.

In fact, it's rather beautiful.

It has wind chimes, and a birdfeeder. A rocking bench out on the front porch, a small flower garden and vegetable patch, a fat orange tabby peeking out the front window. A mailbox with two stick-figure women hand painted onto its side. She thinks of her and Ben's house in the Hudson Valley, moved into but still just a little bit empty.

She'd love if their house looked like this, one day. Evidence everywhere of being lived-in and cared for.

"Hey, you good?" Ben takes the keys out of the ignition but doesn't get out of the car, taking care to meet Beverly's eyes.

He does that a lot, checking in on her. He always seems to know when to ask, when she needs to vent or reassure herself. When she just needs to be wrapped in a hug, or given a mug of tea and left alone.

(On bad nights, when Ben enters a room and she jumps so badly that she drops a glass, cutting her toes on the shards, falling over herself to apologize, he smiles and says he hated that glass anyway. He cleans out her cuts and bandages them. He builds them an elaborate blanket fort in the living room and sets up a feel-good movie, carefully telegraphing all of his movements to keep from startling her. And she loves him, she loves him, she loves him.)

Right now, she wants nothing more than a cigarette to calm her nerves, but she's trying to quit.

"I'm good," she says, even though she's not, and pops a piece of nicotine gum.

If you believe, she thinks fleetingly.

Mike comes out to the yard to greet them, smiling widely, throwing

an arm around Ben and then tugging Bev in to join the hug as well.

“Thanks so much for coming, you two. This is good, I promise, you don’t have to worry.”

He doesn’t *seem* to be in the sort of mood appropriate for breaking to your friends that a murderous intergalactic clown with a very specific vendetta against them has returned from the dead, so that’s something, she supposes.

But he’s almost *suspiciously* happy. Bev hates to think like that, but given their past experiences as a group, she thinks she has the right to be a little cynical.

He leads them inside, introducing them to the couple who runs the place as they pass them on the way out, one of them quietly saying something to Mike about *giving them privacy*, and yeah, Bev’s on high fucking alert.

She loves Mike with all her heart, but they’ve done this song and dance before.

They drop their bags in the front room and Mike leads them into the kitchen to sit, insisting on making them all some hot chocolate.

“You guys seem tense, I *promise* you can relax.”

He takes out four mugs, then seems to reconsider and puts one back.

Beverly and Ben exchange looks and decidedly do *not* relax. Mike isn’t exactly inspiring a lot of confidence.

Once they’re sat down at the table, Ben finally asks, “Mike, what’s going on, man? Seriously.”

“I don’t know if– I mean, Bill and Richie will just be another hour. But I’m not sure–” Mike sighs, frustrated, “This is going to be kind of difficult, and I’m not sure if having more people here will make it easier or harder.”

He’s clearly a little overwhelmed.

“It’s okay, Mike. Just tell us whatever it is, and we’ll go from– Ben?”

He’s gone stiff next to her, inhaling sharply, throwing a hand out to grip her arm. His gaze is locked onto the shelf by the table, holding a few knick-knacks and photos.

She hears Mike mutter, *“Oh, shit.”* and then she sees what they see.

It’s a framed photo of the couple who owns the B&B, arms thrown over the shoulders of the man between them.

That man is Eddie.

He has a fluffy angel’s halo on his head. And a healed scar on his cheek where Bowers stabbed him.

“Mike, we have to get out of this house,” Bev is up in a second, pulling a dazed Ben up along with her, “It’s not safe, clearly there’s something going on, we have to go.”

“No, wait! I can–”

“It’s messing with our heads, Mike, we have to get out!”

Mike isn’t moving, so Ben goes to put an arm around him and hopefully guide him in the direction of the front door.

They’re all talking at once, Ben and Beverly trying to get Mike moving, Mike trying to placate urgently, it’s chaotic and loud and–

“Eddie’s alive!”

Everything freezes.

“What?”

The confession hangs in the air, crackling with tension and heavy silence.

“Mike, he can’t be, we all saw–”

“That’s what I thought, too! But–” He hastily pulls a folded up piece of paper from his pocket, “I found this! And I knew I had to come

back, to see if it was really him.”

It’s a print-out of a Facebook post, creased and crumpled. It shows a picture of Eddie, a small smile on his face. Eddie *alive*. It takes Bev a minute to even read the text below it, calling for help in finding the identity of this amnesiac man, *Richie Taylor*.

Jesus fucking christ.

Ben croaks, “Mike, I don’t–” and puts a hand on Beverly’s shoulder, probably in an attempt to both comfort her and stable himself. She reaches up to cover it with her own. She feels a little dizzy.

“He’s been here for two months, living here with Jules and Val. I don’t know how, yet, but he’s the real deal, I swear. They’d have noticed by now if he was in disguise, especially since– Well,” he cuts himself off, looking a little contrite.

“Since what, Mike?”

“Val grew up in Derry. It took her sister.”

Bev closes her eyes for a moment, taking a deep breath.

God, It’s everywhere. Still.

“So, um,” Ben clears his throat, his voice thick, “Is he here? Eddie?”

The solemn look on Mike’s face turns softly hopeful, “Yeah, we’d thought it’d be best if I broke the news first. I can go get him? If you’re ready?”

Ben puts his arm around Bev fully, and pulls her closer, meeting her eye to make sure that they agree.

“Wait,” she realizes something important, turning to Mike, “The post said he had amnesia, does he even remember us?”

“When I first got here, he didn’t know his own name, but now I’m pretty sure everything’s coming back quicker and quicker. He knows all of us, at least, he just might not remember all of the specifics. I told him everything that happened. In August, I mean.”

Beverly huffs a bitter laugh, “God, what is it with us and all this memory bullshit?”

“It’s still him, though,” Mike assures, “He’s still Eddie.”

Bev shoots one more look at Ben to check in, and he nods at her, “Okay, we’re ready.”

Eddie scrambles to shove the red shirt back under his pillow when someone knocks softly on the door.

He’d heard shouting. He couldn’t make out any words, but there was no mistaking the panicked tone to everyone’s voices.

(He feels guilty for a moment. And then he feels guilty for feeling guilty. It all makes for a heavy knot of discomfort coiling in the center of his chest.)

“Mike?”

The man in question leans in the doorway, “Ben and Beverly are here, they’re all filled in.”

“How’d they take it?”

Mike grimaces, “It was a little rough, but I think they’re on board. And seeing is believing, right?”

It kills monsters, if you believe it does.

Eddie fights off a full-body shudder.

“Yeah. It is.”

Mike leads him back down the hall, and Eddie can feel his pulse hammering in his fingertips, the feeling only magnified by the tight fists his hands are curled into.

Why are you so fucking nervous? It’s Ben and Beverly. You love Ben and Beverly, they’re two of your best friends. Get a fucking grip, Kaspbrak.

(He's terrified that he's not the Eddie that they remember. He's terrified that they're all just humoring him, the shell of the man that they used to know. What if he isn't Eddie at all, just another invention by It to torment and destroy the people he loves. What if none of this is even fucking real in the first place? What if--?)

Every doubt leaves his head when he sees Ben and Beverly standing in the kitchen, eyes red-rimmed and teary. Mike's cautiously hopeful smile as he steps aside.

For a split second, he feels suspended in time. He sees the three of them overlaid at thirteen and forty, grown up but still the same. In all the ways that matter, anyway.

And reality resumes.

Bev's hand flies up to cover her mouth, the other grabbing onto Ben, who makes a small choking sound.

Eddie doesn't really know what to do. The only other time he's done something like this, Mike took the lead.

He thinks about saying, *hey, guys*, or something equally harmless, but he's suddenly too choked up to get out anything at all, so he just stands there kind of dumbly.

Bev makes the first move, stepping closer. Her lips are pressed together in a thin line, trembling slightly as she inspects him carefully, and Eddie does his best not to shrink at the scrutiny.

After a moment, she takes his face in her hands, and he feels her trace her thumb gently over the risen scar on his cheek.

"Is it really you?"

"Yeah, Bev," their voices are equally tremulous, "If you need proof I can tell you all about the time when you and Richie got so stoned, you thought that you were time-travelers and I had to tell my mom that you were rehearsing for the school play."

Jesus, he doesn't know where that came from, but now the memory plays in vivid technicolor in his mind. *It was fucking July, too*, and he

doesn't know how they got away with it.

Beverly laughs wetly in surprise before pulling Eddie into a tight hug, burying her face in his chest.

Eddie feels a hand carding through his hair and looks up at Ben's shocked gaze, but his eyes are crinkling up joyfully at the corners. He throws his arms around both Eddie and Bev, stooping down to press his cheek against Eddie's shoulder. A second later, Mike slots in opposite Ben, resting his chin on top of Eddie's head and completing their little circle.

How could he have forgotten this? Ever? In that awfully lonely twenty-seven years and the two months since waking up in a hospital bed.

The first family that he chose for himself.

(He passingly thinks about introducing the rest of them to Jules and Val, and feels so excited he could burst.)

"I missed you guys so much," Eddie rasps, "Even when I couldn't remember, I knew you were all out there and I missed you."

Ben pulls back to look up at him, his face pink and streaked with tears, but he's smiling, "We just—" he clears his throat, voice too thick to get the words out.

"We missed you more than you can imagine," Bev finishes, looking between them all with a bittersweet smile playing at her lips.

Eddie puts together belatedly, *Oh, they did show up together, didn't they?*

"So, I guess you guys are gonna be the type of couple to finish each other's sentences, huh?"

Mike barks a laugh, Ben snorts grossly and Bev whacks Eddie on the shoulder, squawking, "*Kaspbrak!*"

"Thanks for confirming my hunch," Eddie smirks, "Congratulations on that, by the way."

Beverly's smile dims minutely, but she covers it up quickly. *Oh, Eddie realizes, this isn't news to the rest of the losers, you just don't keep your dead friends updated on all the hot goss by virtue of them being dead.*

"So not the biggest news of the day," she quips, poking him in the ribs.

Mike manages to corral them all to sit in the living room, disappearing into the kitchen with Ben to reheat their cooling mugs of hot chocolate and whip up one more for Eddie.

Once they're all settled, Mike is in one of the big easy chairs, and Ben and Beverly end up on either side of Eddie on the couch, Ben with his arm thrown over the back and Bev with her knees curled up against Eddie's side.

"Okay, not that we're not overjoyed, but how did this happen?"

"We're not quite sure. They found me on the side of the road in Derry about two months ago and brought me to the hospital. I woke up two weeks later and my chest was healing up quicker than what really made sense. We don't even know how I got out from under Neibolt in the first place."

"So, you're--?" Bev raises a tentative hand towards Eddie's chest.

"I have a gnarly looking scar, but I pretty much have a clean bill of health."

"I actually already have some ideas," Mike admits warily, "Some things that popped up in my research the first time around."

"Yeah?" This is the first Eddie's heard about this.

"I haven't said anything because I want to get some books from my storage unit first, but I read some lore about another being. A benevolent one."

"What, like, the anti-It?" Ben asks.

"You could say that, it's called Maturin and it's believed to be a sort of god-like figure. Many people often portray it as a turtle..."

A turtle.

Everything Mike says after that turns to fuzz in Eddie's ears, something about *vomiting up the universe*, but he's too busy remembering the *thousands of fucking turtles* in his dreams and freaking out because there's absolutely no fucking way that's a coincidence.

"Eddie?" Bev's noticed the way that he's gone rigid, his eyes unfocused, "What is it?"

He takes a deep breath. *Benevolent*, Mike had said.

"I've been having this dream. With turtles in it. Lots of turtles."

He remembers fleeting images of one great eye, and *something important. Something he has to remember.*

"Well, that's... promising? Right?" Ben hazards.

"What do you see in these dreams, Eddie?"

He explains the underwater scene to the best of his ability, but he knows he's missing *something, Jesus fucking Christ.*

Mike hums thoughtfully, "I'll have to drop by and pick up some things, do some reading."

Bev takes one of Eddie's clammy hands in hers, "Do you think it's worth looking a gift horse in the mouth? Or are you worried something else might happen?"

"I'm not worried, so much as I want to be thorough."

And gosh, Eddie knows that Mike's doing his best not to freak them all out, but he could not have come up with a *more* cryptic non-answer.

And he's about to say as much when the sound of a car outside draws his attention.

On instinct, he turns towards the noise, peering out the window at

the approaching vehicle, and making eye contact with *Richie fucking Tozier* in the passenger seat.

Richie fucking Tozier who sees Eddie and goes absolutely *white*.

4. Chapter 4

Notes for the Chapter:

lol it's the middle of the night but I never have enough self-control to wait and post until site traffic would be better whoops

thank you all so, so much for your comments. I read every single one and they all make me so fucking happy. I haven't been able to send replies because I've been so busy with finals, but please know that I appreciate them all !!!

warnings for this chapter include: discussions of death and mourning, minor discussions of injuries, discussions of drug addiction

Eddie freezes. Everything freezes.

He sees Richie's face through the windshield, and in the moment before Richie's expression goes slack with shock and grief, something *clicks* back into place.

Some missed contact in his brain, in his soul, in his very fucking *being* sparks back to life and goes, *Yeah, this is it. That's you. I remember you.*

Suddenly, he remembers a lot of things.

It's the same feeling that overtook him back at the Jade, startled out of his skin by some asshole with a gong, turning around to see that it was *him*. Still an asshole. Thirteen and forty and a little shit and the love of Eddie's fucking life all at once.

And then he comes back down to earth, and registers that Richie looks absolutely devastated.

He's not scared of seeing Richie again, but the terrified look on his face at the sight of Eddie hits like a punch in the chest.

Only then does it really sink in, Eddie's still healing, sure. His injuries

were severe and he'll definitely need therapy for the lifelong emotional trauma, but he isn't the only person that his death happened to.

His friends grieved him. They were forced to leave his broken body behind and move on. He hasn't asked, but he doubts they could have had any sort of funeral for him, given that the manner of his death was by intergalactic clown.

(Of course, Eddie feels no bitterness towards them. He's always been of the firm belief that funerals are for the living. Those left behind to pick up the pieces.)

Somehow, he's never actually pictured people crying over him. Mourning him.

Yeah, he's seen it. The dark circles under Beverly's red-rimmed eyes, the tremble in Ben's lower lip. The shudder in Mike's breath when he pulls Eddie close. But only now does it really compute. Only now does he remember the splitting, aching pain of losing Stan and wonder, *is that what they feel for me? Did I do that to them?*

He doesn't have many friends back in New York. No family left other than Myra. Some coworkers. He supposes people would be sad, sure. But no one would miss him like a phantom limb. Not in the way that the losers have missed each other for the past twenty-seven years.

Not in the way that he's missed Richie. Not in the way that Richie seems to have missed him.

It's overwhelming.

To be filled with so much sorrow but to know that it's born of so much love. More love than Eddie's ever known in his adult life.

And okay, Eddie's not firing on all cylinders, he thinks he deserves some slack. But he's not very proud of how he flails and throws himself down off of the couch in a panic at the sight of Richie. Belly to the carpet like he's dodging bullets.

Ben is cursing, and Bev is already up off the couch and halfway to the door, before stopping and hovering uncertainly, "Fuck, what do we

even say?”

Mike jumps up to look out the window over Ben's shoulder, “Oh, shit, Eds did they see you?”

Eddie presses his forehead against the backs of his hands, folded together tightly on the carpet, “Richie definitely did, just for a second. Should I–” *hide in the other room*, is probably what Eddie's going to say, but he's cut off by someone banging frantically on the door.

They can hear muffled voices on the other side, a panicked Bill trying to ask Richie what he saw that set him off, stuttering in his haste.

Abruptly, Eddie feels like a little bit of a dick. (In his defense, Richie tended to give him tunnel vision.) *Bill*. Bill is here, too. Who was so easy to look up to and trust. Who felt so much responsibility for them all. For Georgie.

Bev looks back to Eddie, a question clear on her face.

Eddie sits up, knees creaking as he pushes himself to his feet. And then he nods.

Beverly goes to open the door and Mike is right behind her.

Ben hangs back, angling his body between Eddie and the entryway. Who he's trying to shield from who, Eddie doesn't know.

“Richie, just h-hold on!” The man in question shoulders his way in, looking every inch manic and bewildered, Bill trailing behind, trying to soothe him. “Hi guys, sorry. He said that he saw– Eddie?”

They both go stock still at the sight of Eddie. Present and sustained, not a fleeting glimpse through the window. Solid and opaque. Alive.

And sans gaping chest wound, which seems important.

Richie's eyes, wide and teary and frantic, send him right back. Propped up against the wall of the cistern, delirious with pain, spitting up blood and so, so certain that he won't be leaving this place. Thinking, *if I don't tell him now, I'll never tell him. I'll die and*

he'll never know, he has to know.

"Richie, I have something to tell you."

"Yeah, Eds?"

But he can't do that to Richie. He can't tell him that he loves him and then fucking die. What Eddie needs doesn't matter anymore, what Richie needs is to move forward after Eddie's gone.

So, Eddie doesn't tell him.

Instead, he says, "I fucked your mother," which always meant the same thing anyway.

The force of the memory almost bowls him over. Along with the realization that he has another chance. He can get it all right.

Eddie can't decide if Richie looks as if he's *seen* a ghost, or if he just straight-up *looks* like a ghost. All pale and slack-jawed, eyes like plates and vibrating with an awful nervous energy.

Bill makes a terrible, strangled sort of sound and goes to grab Bev, who's closest to him, tugging her behind him, reaching out for Mike as well, but she removes his hand and takes it in hers instead.

"It's really him, we promise," her voice is soft and steady, as if she's consoling a startled animal, "We only have vague ideas of how, and his memory is still a bit spotty, but we know it's him."

"It d-did this with Georgie, what if—"

"He's been here for two months and everything's been fine, It was never really one to play the long game," Mike explains, "And... I just feel it, Bill. We'd *know* if this wasn't Eddie."

Eddie finally unsticks his tongue from the roof of his mouth, taking a small step forward.

"Hey—" he winces when his voice cracks horribly, so he coughs to clear his throat, "I mean, I— I'm—" he groans into his hands, laughing wryly, "Sorry. Fuck. Fucking christ, I missed you guys so god damn

much. Sorry that I'm apparently in-fucking-capable of speech right now."

His voice is high with nerves and raspy with unshed tears, but Bill just fucking deflates. His tense posture melting away completely as he falls forward, stumbling towards Eddie and hugging him tightly. They're both already blubbering.

Eddie doesn't think that he's ever cried this much in the span of three days.

"I'm so glad you're alive, Eddie," Bill whispers wetly into Eddie's shoulder, and Eddie just squeezes him tighter.

Unable to hold off any longer, he looks up at Richie. Eddie's stomach twists, reading Richie's skipped meals and poor sleep in his newly sharp edges and the pallor of his skin. Taking in the gaunt slopes of his cheekbones, the way his sweater kind of hangs off of him. His glassy, thousand-yard stare.

Richie hasn't been okay, Mike had said. Richie has really been... Spiraling.

Bill releases him with a sniff, glancing back at Richie, who's still motionless. Shoulders drawn up to his ears and clearly putting all of his effort into breathing slowly and deeply. Once it becomes clear that Richie can't (or *won't*) move, Eddie lets himself step closer.

"Hey, Rich."

Eddie's voice is impossibly soft, but Richie blinks and there's a little more clarity in his eyes. A little more life. He raises a hand with quivering fingers towards Eddie's chest, but then shrinks back slightly, hesitating before reaching for Eddie's cheek instead. Extending his pointer finger to delicately trace the scar residing there.

Eddie's eyes fall shut and he fights off a shiver.

(He thinks about being thirteen. About falling asleep in Richie's bed on nights that he had to get away from the *stifling, suffocating, smothering* of his own home. On the rare occasion that Richie would

wake first, he'd poke at Eddie's cheeks until he was lucid enough to smack him away and call him a dickhead.)

He opens his eyes again as Richie's hand falls away, catching it in his own.

Something in Richie's expression just *shatters*.

The tears pooling in his eyes finally stream down his cheeks. He presses his lips together to tamp down on the broken sob rising from somewhere deep in his chest and escaping from his throat, his face scrunching up with the effort. But he still won't move.

(He thinks about the Neibolt house. About watching Richie get tackled to the ground by a grotesque, spidery perversion of Stan. About how in his terror, every one of his muscles had been frozen stiff and useless. About the things that *fear* can do to your body.)

Telegraphing his motions and moving slowly enough to give Richie the chance to stop him, Eddie slips his arms under Richie's, wrapping them around his center. He presses his face into Richie's collarbone and rubs one hand up and down his back.

He presses himself against Richie and breathes deeply, in the hopes that he can feel the rise and fall of Eddie's chest. Evidence that he's *here*, and he's *alive*, and that everything is going to be okay.

With a shudder, Richie finally hugs Eddie in return and starts sobbing in earnest. When his knees buckle, Eddie guides him down to the floor in a snotty heap of limbs and creaking joints.

Richie is muttering something against Eddie's temple, and Eddie realizes that he's *apologizing*. Whispering, *I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry*, like a broken prayer. And that simply won't fucking do.

He pulls his head from the crook of Richie's neck and puts his hands on either side of his face, pressing his forehead against his own. His voice is absolutely wrecked with tears but he can't bring himself to care.

"No. No, Richie stop that, this wasn't your fault."

“It– No, you were saving *me*. If I hadn’t– If I had just–”

”No, ‘if you had just’ *nothing*. It was my choice and I’d save you a million times, asshole. A million times more.”

Richie lets out a sharp keen, and his tears drip down onto Eddie’s cheeks.

“But–”

“And none of it matters now anyway, Rich. I’m *okay*. I’m here. I’m here, and I’m not going anywhere, I promise. You’re gonna get so fucking sick of me.”

For the first time since Eddie’s laid eyes on him, Richie smiles. He laughs, raspy and wet.

“Not in a million years, Eds.”

“Don’t call me that,” flies from Eddie’s lips as a reflex. But he meets Richie’s eyes and smiles in a way that says, *call me that a thousand more times*.

He drops his head to Richie’s chest for a moment, letting all of his breath leave him in one *whoosh*, and collecting himself before he looks up at the rest of the losers.

They’re all as tear-streaked and puffy as Richie and Eddie. Beverly and Ben sitting together on the floor, flanking them on the left. Mike kneeling to their right, one arm around Bill who’s slumped against his side.

“Come on, guys,” Richie rasps, his jovial tone strange when paired with his ruined voice, “Bring it the fuck in, this is a prime group hug opportunity.”

And just like that, everyone piles in. All huddled together, wiping each other’s tears. It’s almost perfect. Then Ben leans his weight just a little too far forward, and they’re all toppling over, shrieking and giggling and a little bit manic as the adrenaline leaves their systems and they start to crash.

Eddie and Richie are lying flat, still all tangled up in each other. Ben is sitting cross-legged with Bev stretched out on his lap, her head pillowed on Eddie's stomach. Mike and Bill sit back to back, and Richie pokes at Bill's thigh with his toes until he lets him rest his feet on his legs.

There, cuddled together on the living room carpet like little kids, Eddie fills them all in on how he came to be... not dead, and everything that's happened since.

Of course, he doesn't have much to offer on the actual *becoming not dead* part of the whole thing, but he explains his dreams and Mike fills in the rest of the Turtle-God information that he can remember.

Somehow, this is not what the losers are most interested in.

"You know, I've gotta say, Eds, I'm really digging this new look," Bev tugs at Eddie's green flannel, tossed over a grey henley. "With the stubble, it's really farmboy chic. You look rugged."

Richie elbows him in the side, "Wow, Eds. You've got the approval of famed fashion designer, Beverly Marsh, that is not something to take lightly. Also, as a human person in possession of eyes, I can attest, this is a step up from the Catholic schoolboy look you were sporting."

Bill barks a laugh, and Eddie scrunches up his face, sputtering indignantly.

"I do a lot of upkeep around here! I earn my keep! You can't do lawn work in fucking khakis, dipshit," he gripes. "And honestly, I was trying to grow a beard to cover up the fucking *stab wound* scar on my face, but it hasn't really been working out."

What Eddie *means* is that the scar is a little too high on his cheek for the facial hair to make much of a difference, but what Richie gleans is, "Aw! Wittle Kaspwak can't grow a beard!"

"Fuck you, man. That's not--"

"You could be a Bond villain! With the scar! Scorned risk analyzer just fucking loses it! Risks all over the goddamn place."

“Okay, first of all, it’s risk *analyst*, and you fucking know this—”

“Eddie, I think it makes you look tough!” Ben interjects, “If I passed you on the street I’d definitely be worried about my lunch money.”

“You keep it up and I fucking will steal your lunch money.”

Ben just laughs, his eyes lingering on Eddie in a quiet disbelief and reminding him, *oh yeah*, back from the dead. Right.

“And anyway, it wasn’t like I remembered how I dress, I just needed clothes that fit.”

Richie hums thoughtfully and Bill’s eyes light up, “Oh yeah! Holy shit, you had amnesia. How the fuck was that?”

“Bill, I want it on the record that you are not allowed to exploit the ridiculous, Lifetime movie plot of my life for your books, you absolute fucking vulture,” Eddie says quite seriously, and Bill just laughs. “But yeah, it was really weird. I had nightmares. About Pennywise and stuff. And even though I couldn’t remember you all, it was like— I guess, that—” Eddie sighs in frustration, screwing up his face at the ceiling as he struggles to find the right words. “It was like I could tell that you were missing. I could feel that you weren’t there, if that makes sense.”

Bev takes his hand and squeezes it, and Richie presses his cheek against Eddie’s shoulder.

“It does, Eddie,” Mike says with a smile.

In this mess of limbs on the floor, swapping stories and just cuddling in the warm silence, is how Val and Jules find them when they arrive back at the farmhouse.

Val huffs a laugh, spotting Eddie in the center of the huddle, “Things went well, I see.”

Eddie gives them a grin, knowing that he looks dopily happy.

Jules looks as if she could cry, “Aw, Rich.”

Oh, Jules, no. Please, fucking no.

Richie looks up with a *huh?* and Mike barks a laugh, the fucking traitor.

“Oh, shoot!” Jules taps her fingers against her forehead a few times, “Sorry! *Eddie, Eddie, Eddie*. I’m still getting used to it.”

“What does that mean?” Richie turns to him, not quite knowing what’s going on, but clearly delighted by the embarrassed flush taking residence in Eddie’s cheeks and the wincing scrunch to his nose. “Eddie. Eddie Spaghetti, what’s going on? What is she talking about?”

“Hear me the fuck out, okay?”

“Eds.”

“I was looking through a book of baby names! I didn’t just want to be fucking John Doe.”

“Spit it out, bud.”

“It sounded familiar! It sounded fucking familiar, so that was what I fucking went with.”

“What did? What was familiar? Huh, Eddie?”

“He’s been going by Richie Taylor!” Mike wheezes, unable to hold it in anymore, “That’s what he was going by when I found him.”

Bev snorts against Eddie’s belly, and Ben presses his lips together, going pink with the effort to hold back his giggles. *And they already fucking knew, too. Assholes.*

Bill’s shoulders are shaking with the force of his silent laughter, leaning on Mike for support. Bill was always the type to laugh so hard that no noise would escape, but Richie was always the opposite. Unabashed with his deep belly laugh.

So Eddie’s surprised when he turns to him and he isn’t laughing. He’s smiling impossibly wide, his eyes crinkled and teary. He looks oddly

touched.

And Eddie can't find it in himself to be embarrassed anymore.

"Everyone, this is Valeria and Juliet Salvatore. Val, Jules, I'd like you to meet the Losers Club," he gestures around in turn, "You've met Mike. Here's Beverly Marsh and Ben Hanscom. That's Bill Denbrough. And this is *Richie Tozier*."

Jules lets out a delighted giggle, having already put two and two together. Val narrows her eyes, taking in what Jules has already noticed.

Glasses. With thick frames.

"Oh. Aw, babe."

After usurping the farmhouse for the entire afternoon, Eddie elects to take the losers to the local diner for dinner. Also because diner food is prime comfort food, and they're all a bit emotionally drained.

(Jules has dragged Eddie to Figgy's on a few of his bad days, when his chest feels too tight and every movement at the corner of his eye is something creepy and crawly and evil. They serve the apple butter from Tish's jam stand that Eddie is so fond of, shamelessly slathering it all over an order of toast at any hour of the day.)

Ted is on shift tonight. A burly, brick shithouse of a man with the absolute softest center. Eddie's witnessed him weeping over one of the feel-good fluff pieces playing on the TV behind the counter, a segment about emotional support dogs at a nearby hospital.

And when they walk in the door, he crows, "Richie-Rich! Who're your friends?"

Bill snorts and Bev elbows him in the side, despite smirking herself.

"Everyone, this is Ted. Ted, these are some childhood friends of mine."

"Nice to meetcha'!" Ted smiles warmly, before it's quickly replaced

by a look of shock. “Wait a fucking second! You sneaky shit, do you-?”

“And it’s Eddie, by the way. Eddie Kaspbrak.” He smiles shyly, this never gets old.

Ted shouts victoriously and tugs Eddie into a big bear hug, lifting him off the ground.

“Eddie! I am so happy for you, you tiny, tiny man.”

Eddie squirms and whacks at the man’s shoulders, fighting off his grin to scowl, “I am not fucking tiny. Fuck off, man.”

“No, Eds, we love your bite-sized self. Your compact, elven, little body,” Richie snickers.

“I’m 5’9”, dickhead.”

“You’re perfect for travel. Curl up right in the carry-on, free flight.”

“Richie, I swear-”

“There’s no need to be insecure, Spagheds! Frodo’s almost as little as you, and he made it all the way to Mount Doom!”

“Wow, I hope you guys enjoyed today because I’m about to strangle Richie. Right in this lovely diner. And then I’m going to go to jail for the rest of my life.”

“You know, Eds, I don’t even think they’d convict you,” Bev muses quite seriously.

Ted sits them down in a booth towards the corner, herding them away from the entrance while scolding Eddie because *no one’s died in here yet, man. That’s what it says on our yelp page: Murder free since fucking always.*

Once they’re settled in, orders made, Eddie slaps his hands down on the table.

“Alright! You already know what I’ve been up to for the last two

months. Update me! Ben and Beverly finally got their shit together, but what else?”

He’s already missed the entirety of their adult lives, and he doesn’t care for that shit at all.

Mike talks all about his road trip around the country. He toured along the east coast’s beaches all the way down to Florida and then made his way out west, all while stopping at the cheesiest tourist attractions he could find. He lets Eddie swipe through the pictures on his phone, beautiful landscape shots of sunsets and mountains, interposed by selfies with the world’s largest dresser and the tree that owns itself.

Ben and Beverly have bought a house in the Hudson Valley, so that each of them can commute into New York for business and for meetings with Bev’s divorce lawyer, intent on turning Tom Rogan to dust. They’ve adopted a massive, goofy-looking rescue dog by the name of Duck, and generally seem to be wonderfully, sickeningly in love.

Bill finally wrote an ending to his movie that he felt *happy* with, and is working through a quiet and amicable split from his wife. He’s quick to clarify that Audra’s still one of his best friends, but that they just don’t really work together as a couple anymore.

Eddie is about to grill Richie, who slumps lower and lower in his seat as it becomes clear that he’s up next when Jody, a young waitress who Eddie doesn’t know very well, passes by with a stack of menus and spots him.

“Holy shit! You’re Trashmouth Tozier!”

“Oh, hey! Um, yeah.” Richie says with a start, quickly plastering a smile onto his face that looks more like a grimace. He simultaneously sits up straighter and seems to shrink in on himself, a feat that Eddie’s not quite sure how he manages.

“Dude, are you like, okay?” Jody asks, looking quite concerned, “You’ve been going through some shit.”

Richie glances at Eddie, and then seems intent to look anywhere else.

“Yeah. Yeah, totally. I bounce back. I’m like a bad rash, you just can’t get rid of me,” he jokes, but it falls a little flat.

Jody nods sagely, “Yeah, right on. That was some bullshit that they published all that crap. Anyway, nice to meet you!”

And then she’s gone, and Eddie’s *real fucking concerned*.

“Rich–”

“I’m going out for a smoke, I’ll be back.”

Eddie has the wherewithal to stutter, “I’m gonna–” to the rest of the losers and point in Richie’s direction before rocketing out of the booth right after him.

It’s dusk outside, and Eddie can see the puff of his breath in the cold evening air, illuminated by the red neon light of the diner sign. Richie is already pulling a cigarette out of the pack with shaking fingers, sitting on the bench out front as he lights it.

Eddie doesn’t say anything, just sits down next to him. The faint crackling of Richie’s cigarette seems impossibly loud.

He always complained about Richie smoking when they were teenagers. Spouting off statistics about lung cancer and heart disease. Coughing dramatically whenever he and Bev showed up to lunch reeking of smoke, scolding them and whining that they’d give him an asthma attack.

He’s still not a big fan, he’d like to keep Richie around for as long as possible, but the scent is so distinctly *him*, that Eddie can begrudgingly admit that it’s something of a comfort. Reminding him of walking home from the barrens around this time of year, moaning about the cold weather. Richie would give Eddie his scarf, tossing it around his neck and taking care to tuck it in neatly, and Eddie would be surprised every time. He’d bury his face in it to keep warm, breathing in the acrid scent without complaint for the rest of the walk. It would cling to his hair and the collar of his shirt for the rest of the evening.

He bummed a cigarette outside of a bar the night he found out that his mother had passed away. Eddie hadn't been sure what had come over him at the time, and the girl kind enough to give him one kept shooting him strange looks as he coughed and sputtered his way through each drag, but now Eddie understands. The need to chase that comfort, even when its context was lost with everything Derry had stolen from them. The comfort of being bundled up tightly by the gentle hands of someone you—

“You don't have to tell me,” Eddie settles on eventually, “Whatever it is. I just want to know that you're okay.”

Richie sighs, dropping the butt of the cigarette and grinding it under his toe.

“I think everyone was expecting me to go off the rails for a while, after we left Derry—”

The *after you died*, goes unsaid, but still hangs heavy in the air.

“—I mean, *I* was half expecting me to go off the rails. It's not my thing anymore, but I had a pretty bad coke problem back when I was really into the party scene out in LA. All the tabloids were already talking about my breakdown at my last show, they all already thought I was nuts or in rehab or whatever the fuck.”

He takes a second to breathe. His hands twitch like he's going to reach for another cigarette, but then he starts cracking his knuckles instead. One by one, each producing a sharp pop.

Eddie thinks absently that it's kind of gross, but he's mostly distracted by Richie's wide palms and long pianist's fingers.

“I just kind of disappeared though, once I got back to LA. No one out there really understood except for Bill, so I cancelled my tour dates and just kind of wallowed. Then I kind of had a nervous breakdown in front of some paparazzi while I was grocery shopping.

“I didn't go full Britney or anything, but there was some ugly crying involved. Some yelling, some cursing. The pictures were really something to behold. And basically everyone thought I was majorly

coked-up until we released a statement that I had *‘recently experienced a personal tragedy and was taking time off to heal,’* or whatever fucking bullshit my manager came up with.”

Richie shivers, so Eddie loops an arm through his so that they can huddle closer in the cold. He only realizes now that they left their jackets inside.

“You didn’t deserve that, Richie.”

He snorts derisively.

“No, for real, asshole. People deserve privacy when they go through shit like we did. They deserve a support system. And you deserve no less just because you happen to have a career that puts you in the public eye.”

“You know, your comforting words kind of lose their effect when you preface them by calling me an asshole.”

Eddie whacks him on the shoulder, “Dickhead. You’re just deflecting because you know I’m right.”

Richie huffs a quiet laugh. “When’d you get so wise, Eddie Spaghetti?”

“I can’t take any credit, it’s all Val and Jules rubbing off on me. And maybe Mike.”

“Nah, Eds, I think it’s all you. You’re the one who taught me how to fold a fitted sheet when we were fourteen.”

Richie tilts his head to the side to look Eddie in the face, his smile soft in a way that sends Eddie’s stomach swooping straight down to his feet. He’s haloed by red light, his hair long enough to curl softly around his ears. He’s still a little puffy around the eyes from all the crying, and pink in the cheeks and nose from the cold.

Eddie can’t believe that he’s here. That he exists at the same time as Richie.

That he gets another chance at living his life for himself.

“You wanna know something, Richie?”

“What’s up, buttercup?”

Eddie steels himself. “Um. When they found me, after everything, they had to cut all my clothes off of me when I got to the hospital, so the only thing I really ended up with was my wedding ring.”

Richie’s goes kind of stiff against Eddie’s side so he figures he’d better hurry this the fuck up before Richie misses the point.

“And I was wracking my brain, trying to remember who this person was, whoever it was that was so important to me and all I could really get were snippets. The first thing that came back to me was glasses. Glasses with thick frames. Dark hair. A penchant for ugly patterns.”

He lets his eyes drop to Richie’s sweater, which vaguely resembles the carpet of a bowling alley, and then looks back up at his face, which is looking increasingly dazed.

“And eventually, I had this vague notion of a person in my head, and I told Jules and Val, I’m not quite sure who this guy is, but I know he’s out there somewhere, and I know that I miss him like hell. And I know that I’m in love with him.”

Richie’s mouth forms a small ‘O’ as he blinks dumbly at Eddie.

“You–? But, I–? Uh.” He pauses, and then wordlessly points to himself, eyebrows furrowed.

“Yes, you.”

Richie sits stock still for a moment, then very intelligently goes, “Huh.”

He’s just sitting there, kind of dumbfounded and quiet, to the point that Eddie gets a little concerned. But the ball is kind of in his court now, so Eddie just sits there with him.

It’s only a little bit excruciating.

“Hey, Rich?”

“Ya-huh?”

“I’m kind of baring my whole soul for you here right now, so it’d help my blood pressure a little bit if you said *something*. I mean no pressure, but like. Anything.”

“Shit, sorry. I just–” Richie finally turns to Eddie, the corners of his mouth turning upwards. “I just had to reevaluate my whole worldview real quick.”

“You did?”

“Mhm,” His smile expands into something wide and glowing and wonderful, “Because never in my life have I ever been this fucking lucky.”

Eddie lets out a sharp laugh in relief, grinning right back.

“I mean, imagine,” Richie continues, “Lucky enough to capture the hearts of not one, but *two* generations of Kaspbraks?”

Eddie growls, “*Oh, you are such a fucking–*”

And then Richie’s mouth is on his, and Eddie can’t bring himself to be angry any longer.

His hands slide up to rest on Eddie’s chest, right over his scar, and Eddie has his fingers curling in Richie’s hair. He tastes like the cigarette he just smoked and the root beer candies that sit on the front desk back at the farmhouse, and his stubble scratches roughly against Eddie’s and it’s just.

It’s everything.

Eddie can’t believe how close he was to missing out on *this*.

Richie breaks the kiss before it can get too heated, resting his forehead against Eddie’s as he catches his breath. It’s a shuddering, airy thing, so Eddie’s fairly certain that he’s staving off tears.

God knows that Eddie is, too.

“In case it wasn’t clear,” Richie says, so quietly. Just for them two. “I love you, too. Since fucking forever.”

Eddie cups Richie’s face in his hands and presses another kiss against his lips.

And another. And another. And another.

Notes for the Chapter:

me, writing this chapter: and I will pepper in the fact that it is bike night

also ^^you may have noticed ... that this is now a part of a series : ~ D

Author's Note:

jules and val are truly living the life that i want to be living

bother me on [tumblr](#), and [reblog this fic](#) if you like it!

kudos and comments will heal my mono <3